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ABSTRACT

To help their children make a successful transition between high school and college, Latino parents must know about the process and what actions need to be taken when. A telephone survey of 1,054 Latino parents in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles and in-depth interviews with 41 of them examined how and to what extent these parents have acquired such information, dubbed "college knowledge." The survey included an eight-item "mini-test" of factual college knowledge. About two-thirds of respondents missed at least half of the items. Knowledge deficits were significantly more evident among parents with lower incomes and educational levels and among first-generation immigrants. Parents acquired college knowledge from counselors, teachers, and family and from printed materials and the Internet. Both English and Spanish mass media were conspicuously absent as sources of information. Language barriers were an extremely important factor impeding acquisition of college knowledge. While exposure to college representatives and events was low, its impact was robust. Knowledge levels and information-seeking behaviors are analyzed for parents of high, middle, and low socioeconomic status. Recommendations are offered for outreach to Hispanic parents. Two appendices present the survey mini-test and methodology. (TD)

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COLLEGE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT LATINO PARENTS NEED TO KNOW AND WHY THEY DON'T KNOW IT

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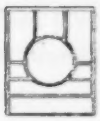

The Tomás Rivera
POLICY INSTITUTE

Founded in 1985, The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute advances critical, insightful thinking on key issues affecting Latino communities through objective, policy-relevant research, and its implications, for the betterment of the nation.

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COLLEGE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT LATINO PARENTS NEED TO KNOW AND WHY THEY DON'T KNOW IT

A Report by
the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute

Louis G. Tornatzky, Ph.D.
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Gratefully,

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In order to make a successful transition between high school and college, Latino youth need to move through a number of milestones and prerequisites. Through the high school years, parents need to be actively involved in shepherding their children through this process. However, in order to play a positive role, parents must know about these milestones and prerequisites and what actions need to be taken when. We have labeled this bundle of instrumental information "college knowledge." How, and to what extent, Latino parents acquire college knowledge is the focus of the current study.

RESEARCH APPROACH

A two-fold research approach was used by the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute (TRPI) to address the study objectives. This included:

1. A telephone survey of 1,054 Latino parents in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles
2. Detailed case-study interviews of 41 Latino parents in those cities

Data collection included an objective "mini-test" of factual college knowledge, as well as an examination of predictive factors that might be associated with more or less college-relevant knowledge being acquired by parents. The predictive factors included how parents use various information sources and channels for learning about college.

RESULTS

College knowledge was objectively low among the Latino parents surveyed. A majority could be considered as having failed the mini-test of college knowledge, as 65.7% of the parents missed at least half of the rather straightforward information items. The practical implication is that unless these knowledge deficits are remedied, their children are likely to miss out at one or more crucial steps in getting qualified for college. These knowledge deficits were significantly more evident among parents with lower incomes and educational backgrounds as well as among first-generation immigrants.

Being able to effectively use counselors, teachers, and college representatives as information sources was associated with a higher degree of college-relevant knowledge. Families and relatives can be an important knowledge acquisition factor, but this influence may be attenuated when family members are scattered geographically or when there is little higher education experience. The Internet is an increasingly utilized and effective college knowledge resource, as are events or venues in which there is a high degree of participation by colleges themselves (e.g., college nights).

Significant by their relative absence were any significant roles played by formal media—radio, TV, newspapers—in helping Latino parents acquire college knowledge. This was true of both Spanish and English language sources.

Language barriers constituted an extremely important negative factor in acquiring college knowledge. This was apparent across different communication channels and sources—face-to-face interaction with teachers or counselors, written materials from schools and colleges, and participating in information dissemination events such as college nights.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Make increased college knowledge a priority among Latino advocacy, political, and cultural organizations. Parents must know what they should do to prepare their children for college and when they need to do it.

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- Make increased college attendance a performance metric for the ongoing assessment of secondary schools.
- Launch a long-term public service announcement (PSA) campaign encompassing both Spanish-language and English-language radio and TV.
- Launch increased and focused college knowledge outreach to Latino parents in low socio-economic status (SES) communities.
- Expand understanding among low-SES and immigrant communities and families about economic trends, future labor markets, and the rationale for college matriculation.
- Increase the number of high school counselors and teachers who are genuinely bilingual.
- All hard copy correspondence to parents from high schools on college preparation should be routinely provided in both Spanish and English.
- College application materials and descriptive literature, whether hard copy or available on Web sites, should be routinely provided in both Spanish and English.
- All college knowledge informational events—college nights, open houses—should be routinely staffed with bilingual Spanish speakers and translators.
- Increase the scope, frequency, and visibility of college "events" such as college nights, open houses, and campus visitations.
- Working with college admissions offices, increase the use of "college rooms" in high schools.
- Make campus visits more economically and logistically accessible to Latino parents.
- Increase local, state, and federal spending on programs to increase college knowledge among Latino families.
- Benchmarking surveys should be commissioned to uncover demonstrably effective approaches ("best practices") to addressing the issues of increasing college knowledge and Latino college matriculation.

II

Recent volatile economic conditions notwithstanding, the long-term trends are robust for the continuing growth of a global "knowledge economy." That knowledge economy is characterized by:

1. Global business systems, abetted by new advances in transportation systems and telecommunications
2. Markets and products that are increasingly sophisticated and have high technology content
3. Most importantly, an insatiable demand for workers that are skilled and educated. The era of being able to leverage a high school educational background—or less—into an increasingly remunerative and challenging lifetime of work is over

Latinos[1] can either participate in the higher-paying, opportunity-rich jobs of the knowledge economy, or not. If the former, it is near essential that they acquire some level of postsecondary education experience and credentials. If they opt for the latter, either by deliberate choice or inaction, there is a good chance of being locked into dead-end jobs, with limited opportunities to support families and participate in the American dream. Conversely, if Latinos avail themselves of college opportunities, the long-term effects on personal and family income are well established.[2] The majority of new jobs—and almost all jobs that pay enough to support a rewarding style of life—demand college experience. The challenge for the Latino community is to maximize the fraction of young people who successfully make the transition to college. The message is loud and clear: increase higher education enrollment as quickly as possible.

Facing the critical question of increasing college matriculation, we focus on Latino parents' knowledge about the prerequisites, paths, processes, and milestones that lead their children to college. For ease of exposition, we have labeled this bundle of instrumental information "college knowledge." How, and to what extent, Latino parents acquire college knowledge is the focus of the current study. It seeks to better understand those interactions between parents, schools, and other sources of information that enable parents to help launch their children into higher education.

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[1] TRPI uses the Latinos and Hispanic interchangeably to refer to individuals who trace their origin or ancestry to the Spanish-speaking parts of Latin America and the Caribbean.

[2] For a useful treatment on the relationships between education and income, see Appendix C in: Vernez, G. and R. Krop (1999). Projected Social Context for Education of Children: 1990–2015. New York: The College Board. They report that: "Annual family income increases 31.6% for men and close to 50 percent for women upon completing high school. Attending colleges increases income 16.5 and 21.5 percent per year for men and women, respectively, while earning a bachelor's degree or more adds an additional 15 percent per year to the family income of men and 21 percent per year to the income of women."

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Unfortunately, too few Latinos do make the transition to higher education. Latinos, both foreign born and native born, have the lowest high school completion rate of any major ethnic group,[3] and are projected to have the lowest percent of college graduation by the year 2015.[4] While some have argued that Latinos can successfully delay matriculation to college until after entering the work force, available data indicate that this is typically associated with a reduced chance of a student completing a baccalaureate degree and a delayed entry into a lifetime of higher earnings.[5]

There are also macroeconomic aspects of the problem of Latino college matriculation. To a significant degree the history of the United States is one of successive waves of immigration, often involving ethnic groups with poor education and weak English skills, who somehow achieve social and economic integration into the society in later generations. Fortunately for those groups and the country, these prior periods of large-scale immigration have occurred in economic eras in which job and income mobility was possible with modest education and skills, such as in labor-intensive and often unionized manufacturing, construction, and mining. In contrast, the current period of rapid Latino immigration is occurring at the same time that a growing "knowledge economy" is becoming much more focused on educational attainment. In some communities, the rapid growth of a poorly educated, heavily immigrant Latino demographic group is at the same time overpowering school systems and underserving the hiring needs of companies for skilled and educated workers.[6] The latter end up recruiting their high-skill labor force from other states[7] or countries with a surplus of engineers, scientists, and technicians.

However, the enrollment of Latino youth in higher education is not a single, discrete event that somehow occurs in the last year of high school. Getting an acceptance letter—or letters—from college admissions is but a juncture in a long path of events that starts in middle school or before. For Latino students and their parents, some of the key milestones and choice points on that pathway include the following:

CHOOSING TO STAY IN SCHOOL

While a large component of the lower high school completion rate for Hispanics may be explained by record rates of immigration, the fact remains that first- and later-generation Latinos are also two to three times more likely than their non-Latino peers to drop out.[8]

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[3] Gandera, P. and J. Maxwell-Jolly (1999). Priming the Pump. Strategies for Increasing the Achievement of Underrepresented Minority Undergraduates. New York: The College Board.

[4] Vernez and Krop (1999). Op cit

[5] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (1997). Indicator of the Month: Sub-baccalaureate Persistence and Attainment," Washington, DC, October.

[6] Cleeland, N. (2002) L.A. Workers Held Back by Low Education Rate. Los Angeles Times, February 5, 2002.

[7] Ironically, in studies of the interstate migration of recent college graduates in engineering and the sciences, some of the same states that have experienced high growths in their Latino population are the very same states (e.g., California, Colorado) that are migration destinations for the highly skilled. See: Tornatzky, L., Gray, D., Tarant, S. A., and J.E. Howe (1998). Where Have All the Students Gone? Interstate Migration of Recent Science and Engineering Graduates. Research Triangle Park, NC: Southern Growth Policies Board.

[8] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2001). High school dropouts by race/ethnicity and recency of migration. Education Statistics Quarterly. Fall.

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TAKING A DEMANDING CURRICULUM

Getting in and succeeding in college is demonstrably a function of taking a rigorous, demanding curriculum[9] in high school. This includes, at the very least, participating in "college prep," but increasingly also demands exposure to college-oriented advanced placement (AP) classes. At the more elite institutions, admission is nearly impossible without the latter.

LEARNING ABOUT COLLEGES AND COLLEGE LIFE

Making productive choices about college usually implies some basic knowledge about the college experience, different kinds of colleges, and relative costs and advantages. Unless an older child or parent has been to college and the attendant decisions have already been made and results weighed, family understanding of college life will be a mix of anecdote, media images, and urban legend. Parents need to take the initiative in seeking information from their child's teachers, counselors, and college representatives by personally asking for advice, attending conferences, and open houses as well as doing their own information gathering using the Internet. Parents have the responsibility of taking their child's long view that includes hopes and ambitions matched to the appropriate form of postsecondary education for the kind of lifetime work experience and income they hope to attain.

FINDING A WAY TO PAY FOR COLLEGE

Many parents in low-income, working class families have incomplete knowledge about both the costs of different kinds of college, as well as about alternate ways to finance those expenses. They must learn about scholarships, loans, and other forms of financial aid, and they cannot afford to wait until graduation from high school is approaching.

All of the above imply active, instrumental behaviors on the part of students, parents, and school officials. However, in order for parents to guide and assist their child along the path to college they must have: 1 motivation to do so; and 2 knowledge about what to do. Motivation here is based mostly on parents' desire to do right by their children, and to open future life opportunities. Based on data reported here, and even the most cursory appreciation of Latino family dynamics, we know that the vast majority of Latino parents want their children to succeed educationally and vocationally. In the context of the knowledge economy discussed above, there might be even greater incentives for parents if they understand more completely the relationship between education and future job opportunities (somewhat more of a problem with immigrant families). However, even given variations in motivation as a function of experience, class status, and parental background, parents still need to act on the basis of knowledge of what to do.

A PROCESS MODEL OF POSTSECONDARY MATRICULATION

Enrollment in college is a critical juncture in the life of any youngster, as well as a proud moment for his or her parents. From that point forward, the young person—if successful in college—will significantly increase earning potential, social standing, and life chances. Looking retrospectively, that juncture should also be seen as the culmination of years of student and parent decisions, behaviors, and values. Those activities start in grade school and continue throughout the school years. In terms of discrete events, they number into the hundreds or thousands over the thirteen years of K–12 education. They are also undoubtedly additive in impact. The parent who points out the fine points of local colleges dozens of time to a child, is likely to have more of a cumulative effect than a parent who starts that dialogue over Christmas vacation in the senior year. Similarly, the parent who has the wherewithal or foreknowledge to badger teachers, counselors and college representatives about how current choices in courses and extramural experiences will impact college admission is likely to be ahead of the game.

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[9] Adelman, C. (1999) Answers in the Tool Box: Academic Intensity, Attendance Patterns, and Bachelor's Degree Attainment. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

It is also clear that the Latino community is not homogenous in terms of parent and student knowledge of, and involvement in, activities that will contribute to college matriculation. For the sake of conceptual simplicity and economy of presentation, it might be useful to identify three hypothetical groups of Latino families:

1. The socio-economically endowed
2. The socio-economically challenged
3. The positive outliers

THE ENDOWED

There are many Latino families that in terms of college knowledge and relevant behaviors look not all that different from their non-Latino peers. As documented in a recent TRPI study,[10] there is a growing Latino middle class that is slowly but inexorably closing the gap in educational attainment and income between themselves and non-Latino whites. These individuals tend to be second or third generation in immigrant status—the U.S.-born children of Latino immigrants—who have closed most of the education gap. Parents in these families are more likely to be college graduates or attendees. As such, they have an experience-based understanding of the higher education system, and what needs to be done to qualify their children for admission. Many of them have succeeded in business and professional fields, and understand the linkage between educational attainment and a middle-class life.

In addition to the income and occupational benefits of middle class status, the "endowed" Latino family is also more likely to be connected to networks of formal and informal college knowledge. From a theoretical perspective, one of the alleged advantages of middle-class status is that it increases the "social capital" available to a family. That is, there are simply more ways to access information and resource providers, that are less available or visible to working-class families. While it is arguable whether higher-class standing confers more social capital, or simply qualitatively different types of social capital, there are demonstrably different rates of college matriculation as a function of socio-economic status (SES). Among middle-class, educated Latino parents there is likely more shared "lore" about how to make the educational system—particularly postsecondary institutions—responsive to their needs. One of the objectives of the current study is to describe the effective use of social capital by Latino families trying to gain college admission for their sons and daughters.

THE CHALLENGED

In stark contrast, there is a growing (percentage-wise) portion of the Latino community that labors under the burdens of lower income and education. Significantly increased in number by changes in immigration patterns over the past few decades, this is a group that tends to have less English-language skills, less educational attainment, a work history that tends to involve lower-skilled jobs, and limited experience in dealing with higher-education systems. For example, only 57.4% of Hispanics nationwide have completed high school, compared to 82.3% of whites and 75.3% of African-Americans.[11] It is not that less-educated parents necessarily have lower aspirations for their children, but that those aspirations are less likely to be backed by knowledge on how to work the system. Personal networks (e.g., social capital) are less likely to transcend the boundaries of one's own ethnic and class cohort, and interactions with the formal educational system are more likely to be hampered by language difficulties.

THE POSITIVE OUTLIERS

Neither the authors of this report nor the leadership of TRPI take the position that class standing is immutable destiny. The story of America is the never-ending saga of individuals and groups climbing above the place to which they have been assigned on the basis of their ethnicity, race, or class standing. So it is with U.S. Latinos generally, and particularly so—we believe—with postsecondary matriculation.

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[10] Bean, F. D., Trejo, S. J, Capps, R., and M. Tyler (2001). The Latino Middle Class: Myth, Reality and Potential. Claremont, CA: The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, 2001.

[11] Gandera and Maxwell-Jolly (1999). Op cit

A major objective of this study is to confirm the extent and to understand the dynamics of those Latino families that might be considered **positive outliers** in terms of postsecondary educational attainment, and presumably college knowledge. That is, the Latino student and parent team that, *in spite of limited income and parental educational background,* achieves academic success in K–12 and is able to make the transition to college thereafter. On the basis of observation, anecdote, and national statistics we know that many working-class Latino youngsters make the transition to college. We would like to better understand if there are recurrent patterns of parent-school-student interaction that might be replicated by others, and more importantly enabled by policies and programs.

The positive outlier phenomenon has been interpreted primarily in terms of the character strengths of parents and families. In effect, a Horacio Alger story. While such an explanation undoubtedly contains many kernels of truth, it overlooks potential **policy and program implications** of the positive outlier phenomenon. For example, what can the school do in terms of staffing, outreach, and special programs to encourage an active role for parents in getting their child ready for college? How can critical "college knowledge" be packaged—linguistically and otherwise—so as to be more accessible to the immigrant family? What outreach roles should institutions of higher education play vis-à-vis Latino communities and families? How can federal, state, or local educational agencies contribute to best-practices development, identification, and utilization in this area?

WHAT DO WE KNOW?

- Academic achievement and exposure to an intellectually-challenging curriculum in high school, coupled with an informed strategy for gaining college admission, is the best way to offset the deleterious effects of Low-SES on postsecondary enrollment.[12]
- Parental involvement in a child's educational choices is known to influence academic achievement and enrollment of Latinos in postsecondary education.[13] Involvement takes the form of talking with the child about:
  - Selecting courses and programs at school
  - School activities of particular interest to the student
  - Things the student had studied in class
  - Grades
  - Plans and preparation for the ACT or SAT
  - Applying to college or other schools after high school[14]
- Parental involvement can also involve:
  - Attending school activities
  - Parent-teacher conferences
  - Parent nights
  - Volunteering to assist in classes[15]
- Concerned parents seek information from a variety of sources in addition to schools. They may use information networks of friends, relatives, coworkers, as well as institutional sources. Social capital is a concept that has been used to describe these networks of information sources,[16] formal and informal.

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12 U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (1997). Access to postsecondary education for the 1992 high school graduates, NCES 98–105, Washington, D.C.

13 U.S. Department of Education (1996). National Education Longitudinal Study: 1988–94 Data files and electronic codebook system/ CD-ROM. Washington, D.C.

14 Fashola, O., Slavin, R.,Calderon, M, and R. Duran (1997). Effective programs for Latino students in elementary and middle schools. CRESPAR Report No. 11. Center for Research on Education of Students Placed at Risk, Johns Hopkins University.

15 Henderson, A.T., and N. Berla. (1994). A New Generation of Evidence: The Family is Critical to Student Achievement. Washington, D.C: National Committee for Citizens in Education.

16 Stanton-Salazar, R. D. and S.M. Dornbusch (1995). Social capital and the reproduction of inequality: Information networks among Mexican-origin high school students. Sociology of Education, 68:116–135.

WHAT DO WE NOT KNOW?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study seeks:

1. To document the extent of knowledge about college ("college knowledge") among a representative population of Latino parents
2. To identify the approaches—sources and channels—that Latino parents use to gain college knowledge
3. To determine if lower-SES Latino parents use distinctive approaches to gaining college knowledge, particularly those who are demonstrably well informed ("positive outliers")
4. To identify the types of interactions between parents and schools, or other sources of information, that seem to work best in gaining college knowledge
5. To suggest policy, practice, and program implications of the findings

THE APPROACH

A twofold approach was used to address the study objectives. The two methodological components were:

1. A **telephone survey** of Latino parents in three major metropolitan areas—Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles
2. Detailed **case-study interviews** of a small number of Latino parents who were identified as "positive outliers," as discussed above

The former yielded quantitative data that enabled statistical consideration of the study questions, through both descriptive and predictive analyses; the latter produced qualitative information that led to richer interpretations of the statistical results as well directions for further study. A novel component of the survey was an eight-item "mini-test" to assess parental college knowledge (see Appendix A). The methodological details of the overall study are presented in Appendix B.

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As discussed above, the quantitative analysis involved some descriptive statistics, coupled with extensive predictive or inferential analyses using multiple regression. In turn, results from the case interviews were analyzed and organized into qualitative themes. Results from each of these analytic approaches are presented here.

DESCRIPTIVE RESULTS

COLLEGE KNOWLEDGE

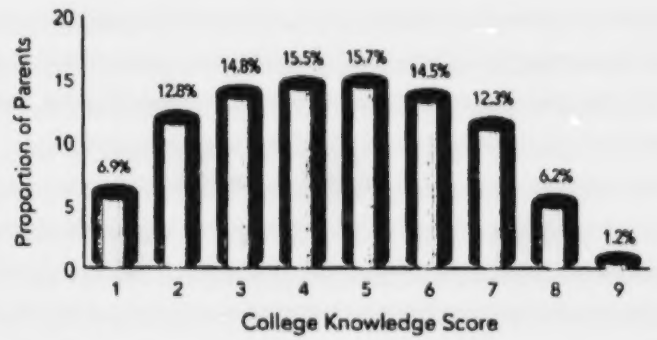
The focus here was to see if certain demographic factors assumed to be linked to social capital resources are, in turn, related to differences in college knowledge. The two demographic factors that were examined in this manner were:

1. Socio-economic status
2. Immigrant generation

However, the team looked first at the distribution of college knowledge scores across the entire phone survey sample. These are presented in graphical form in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1:

DISTRIBUTION OF PARENTS BY THEIR COLLEGE KNOWLEDGE SCORE



As can be seen, the data closely approximate a normal curve in terms of the distribution of scores. The average[17] score across the survey sample was 3.51 (out of a possible score of eight). In fact the lack of college knowledge across this sample of Latino parents of potential college-going students is disconcerting; 65.7% of these Latino parents missed at least half of the rather simple information items, and 19.7% missed seven or all of the items. The practical implication is that unless these knowledge deficits are remedied, their children are likely to miss out at one or more crucial steps in getting qualified for college.

To illustrate the relationship between key demographic factors and college knowledge, two other comparisons were developed. In figure 2 data are presented on parental college knowledge that have been organized in terms of three different levels of socio-economic standing (SES)—low, middle, and high. Each of these levels is a composite of the education and reported income of the parents who participated in the survey.

[17] Unless otherwise noted, "average" herein will connote a mean score rather than a median or mode.

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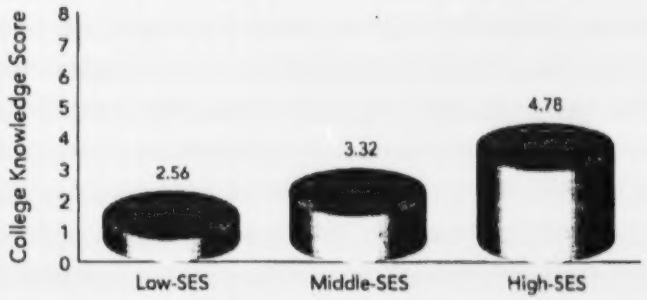
FIGURE 2:

COLLEGE KNOWLEDGE SCORE
BY SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS (SES)



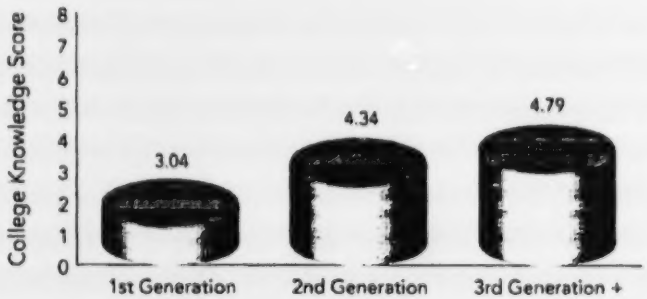
Again, the results[18] are startling albeit in a different manner. There were clear differences in the amount of college knowledge across the three SES levels. Low-SES parents had an average college knowledge score of 2.56, middle-SES parents scored an average of 3.32, and high-SES parents scored 4.78. To illustrate the disparities, 34.1% of low-SES parents missed seven or eight items on the college knowledge mini-test, compared to 5.4% of high-SES parents. Of the high-SES parents, 39.6% scored six or above on the knowledge test, compared to 16.3% of low-SES parents.

It is clear that the experiences and access to information afforded by one's job setting, income, and personal educational background puts Latino parents into quite different levels of college knowledge. Low-SES parents are clearly at a disadvantage.

One additional demographic comparison is worth noting. When the overall sample is broken down by immigrant generation there are again significant differences in college knowledge. For example, Figure 3 presents average college knowledge scores for three Latino parent groupings: first-generation immigrants, second-generation parents, and third-generation. The associated mean college knowledge scores are 3.04, 4.34, and 4.79 respectively. Again, to the extent that social capital makes sense as an explanatory concept, one might infer that first-generation Latinos with limited formal or informal connections—and social capital—outside of their ethnic and immigrant cohort are correspondingly disadvantaged in terms of understanding the workings of U.S. educational systems.

FIGURE 3:

COLLEGE KNOWLEDGE SCORE
BY IMMIGRANT GENERATION



[18] These differences were statistically significant at $p < .05$ or less. The terms "statistical significance" and "statistically significant" refer to the probability level that an observed statistical result could have occurred simply by chance. For example, a result with a probability (p) value of <.05 indicates that the chances are less than one in 20 that the result could have occurred by chance. Similarly, a (p) of <.01 would indicate a less than one in a hundred chance occurrence, which would in fact be a very powerful result.

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One tentative conclusion that was made as a result of this descriptive and comparative reconnaissance of the phone survey data was that the knowledge acquisition processes of Latino parents might be qualitatively different across socio-economic strata. As a result, a revised strategy for subsequent predictive analysis was developed that recognized that fact. The poignancy of the descriptive findings on college knowledge is underscored by one other result from the survey. Of the 1,054 respondents, 96% said that they expected their children to attend college. Given the gross disparities across Latino families in the instrumental knowledge necessary to accomplish this goal, this may be a recipe for widespread disappointment.

PATTERNS OF INFORMATION SEARCH

A second thrust of the descriptive analysis was to examine overall trends in how parents acquire college knowledge. In terms of the survey data collection, there were two approaches to understanding the "how" of information search.

One was to look at **sources** of college-relevant information. Sources might be teachers, family, friends, school counselors, or coworkers. Survey respondents were asked "from whom have you learned the most about" four different areas of college knowledge. Those four areas were: advanced placement classes, college prep curriculum, information about types of colleges and tests that they require, and financial aid.

The information source preferences (judged as "learned most") from those parents who had some knowledge about a particular college knowledge area (e.g., AP classes) and who currently had kids in school are presented in Table 1. Across the college knowledge areas, school counselors and teachers tend to be the primary sources of information, followed by family members, and the child or child's friends. For information areas that are more external to high school operations—such as characteristics of colleges, testing requirements, and financial aid—college representatives emerge as another important knowledge source.

A comparable breakdown of the "most helpful" communication **channels**[19] for college-relevant information is presented in Table 2. As can be seen, overall the most highly rated communication channels are parent-teacher conferences, printed materials, informal conversations, and the Internet. Notable by their almost infinitesimal rates of use for acquiring college knowledge are the vari-

TABLE 1:

PERCENT OF PARENTS RATING A KNOWLEDGE SOURCE AS MOST INFORMATIVE

Source	Advanced Placement	College Prep	College Information	Financial Aid	Mean Ratings
Counselor	32%	29%	21%	20%	25.5%
Teacher	24%	22%	16%	10%	18%
Family/Relative	11%	14%	12%	9%	11.5%
Child/Friends	11%	12%	8%	5%	9%
College Rep	3%	4%	10%	7%	6%

[19] Channels that received a very low level of nomination as useful sources were excluded from the table.

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TABLE 2:

PERCENT OF PARENTS RATING A KNOWLEDGE CHANNEL AS MOST HELPFUL

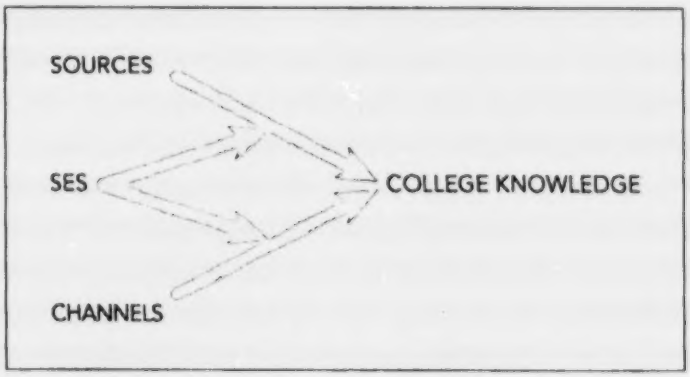
Channel	Advanced Placement	College Prep	College Information	Financial Information	Mean Ratings
Parent-Teacher Conferences	25%	21%	11%	8%	16.25
Printed Materials	13%	15%	19%	11%	14.5%
Informal Conversation	15%	16%	10%	9%	12.5%
Internet	8%	9%	16%	13%	11.5%
College Visits	4%	5%	5%	5%	4.75%
College Outreach	3%	5%	5%	4%	4.25%
College Nights	5%	4%	4%	4%	4.25%
PTA Meetings	6%	5%	3%	2%	4%
Spanish Language Radio/TV	2%	1%	1%	2%	1.5%
English Language Radio/TV	2%	2%	1%	1%	1.5%
Spanish Language Newspapers	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
English Language Newspapers	2%	1%	2%	1%	1.5%
Union	1%	1%	-	1%	0.75%

ous media outlets—TV, radio, and newspapers—in both Spanish and English languages. Interestingly, the three channels in which the colleges provide a venue for information exchange (college nights, college visits, and college outreach) taken together account for a respectable audience share.

These descriptive results suggest an interesting follow-up question. That is, whether different sub-groups of parents used sources and channels to comparable extents or in distinctive combinations, and are those combinations related to acquiring more college knowledge. This question was addressed by the regression analyses, with results discussed in the next section.

PREDICTIVE ANALYSES*

The team ran three separate regression analyses, for each of the three levels of SES. The predictive model is shown below:



* Expanded regression results will be presented in future TRPI publications or may be obtained by request.

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TABLE 3:

HIGH-SES PREDICTOR VARIABLES

Predictor Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient *B*	Standardized Coefficient *Beta*	t	Significance Level *p*
Attending a School Event in Order to Get College Knowledge	.178	.192	3.198	.002
Parental English Proficiency	.815	.188	3.172	.002
Using School Counselors as a College Knowledge Source	.201	.145	2.441	.015

The model assumes that the effects of sources and channels on college knowledge will depend on SES (in other words, sources and channels will interact with SES in influencing college knowledge). Put another way, the way that parents get college knowledge is conditioned by their SES.

In all three analyses, parent college knowledge scores functioned as the dependent or outcome variable. In effect, the statistical technique was used to identify which variables or factors seemed to have a significant and non-redundant effect upon Parental College Knowledge for the sample population. The independent variables that appeared to be significant[20] predictors of the dependent variable were somewhat different in each of the SES sub-samples.

HIGH-SES PARENTS

This sub-sample consisted of parents with family incomes more than $35,000 and at least some college education. As noted above, their level of college knowledge tended to be higher than other parent groups. One can assume that their college knowledge search behavior is likely to be more proscribed, since they are likely to already know the basic facts and milestones. Based on the survey data, college knowledge was influenced most by the following variables, which are presented in their order of predictive power in Table 3:

Compared to knowledge search behavior on the part of other Latino parents, those who are more educated or make more money tend to use few sources or channels for college knowledge. One interpretation is that based on their own experience, or those of close relatives and peers, they already have the basic knowledge down pat. As noted above, the average college knowledge scores of high-SES parents are significantly higher. For high-SES families, English proficiency emerged as a very significant factor. In fact, for high-SES parents the school counselor is the only significant source variable. Given the relative dearth of counselors in most high schools, their importance as a college knowledge source is notable.

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20 In statistical parlance, the Beta weight of a particular variable was such that it added unique (irrespective of other variables) and statistically significant predictive power to the dependent variable. The criterion for statistical significance was a t value of a size such that the probability of chance occurrence was less than 1 in 20 ($p < .05$). In most cases, the p was much lower. For the less statistically inclined, a higher t value and a lower p indicate a stronger predictive relationship.

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Unlike the other two cohorts, high-SES parents also get knowledge from attending school events. One might also interpret these results as indicating that high-SES parents are focused and economical in their search behavior. Their knowledge may be college-specific information, easily gathered via direct contact with counselors or in student events.

MIDDLE-SES PARENTS

The following predictor variables, presented in Table 4, are most related to the college knowledge outcome for middle-SES parents. These were parents that either had family income above $35,000, but with a high school education or less, or where family income was below $35,000 but the parents had some college. It seems clear that middle-SES Latino parents, who are themselves in economic and educational transition, tend to use to good effect a number of source and channel options. Again, the school counselor was a significant predictor as a knowledge source, as was the teacher. One might characterize the information search behavior of these parents as widespread harvesting. The significance of union membership and Internet use is unique to middle-SES parents, perhaps reflecting their current job settings.

TABLE 4:

MIDDLE-SES PREDICTOR VARIABLES

Predictor Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient *B*	Standardized Coefficient *Beta*	*t*	Significance Level *p*
Using Teachers as a College Knowledge Source	.444	.230	4.173	.0001
Using School Counselors as a College Knowledge Source	.304	.185	3.560	.0001
Using the Internet as a College Knowledge Channel	.365	.157	3.077	.002
Using Informal Conversations as a College Knowledge Channel	.339	.140	2.680	.008
Being a Later-Generation Latino	.402	.144	2.437	.015
Being a Union Member	.466	.111	2.188	.029
Using College Representatives as a College Knowledge Source	.367	.106	2.117	.035

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TABLE 5:

LOW-SES PREDICTOR VARIABLES

Predictor Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient *B*	Standardized Coefficient *Beta*	t	Significance Level *p*
Using College Representatives as a College Knowledge Source	.653	.205	3.950	.0001
Using School Counselors as a College Knowledge Source	.372	.213	3.813	.0001
Using Family Member or Relative as College Knowledge Source	.519	.206	3.789	.001
Being a Later-Generation Latino	.617	.182	2.875	.004
Using Teachers as a College Knowledge Source	.301	.168	2.819	.005

LOW-SES PARENTS

Table 5 presents the predictor variables that were most related to the college knowledge outcome for low-SES parents. These were parents with less than $35,000 of family income and high school or less educational attainment. Interestingly, using college representatives, school counselors, and family members were powerful information source predictors. In contrast to the middle SES sub-sample, neither Internet use nor union memberships were significant predictors. However, the effective use of family members as information sources was unique as a predictor to lower-SES parents.

OVERVIEW OF THE PREDICTIVE ANALYSES

Except for the variables noted in the tables above, all of the other variables examined in the analysis were not significant predictors of college knowledge. Notable (by its absence) as a predictor among channel variables that were expected to be significant was parent-teacher conferences. Although parent-teacher conferences are the most frequently mentioned information channel (see Table 2), the predictive analyses suggest that parents may not receive as much information through this venue as via other information sources or channels. Perhaps parents receive information in the context of conferences that they have already received from other more effective venues. In this sense, parent-teacher conferences may simply serve to reinforce other communication sources and channels, or to provide more general motivational input.

On the other hand, the teacher was a significant source variable among low- and middle-SES parents and, as was noted above, a highly utilized source across the entire population. We must look to the case studies to learn just what communications between parents and teachers result in knowledge acquisition. For example, informal communications between parents and teachers may function as a more useful channel than formal conferences.

The school counselor was the only knowledge source variable that was a significant predictor at all levels of socioeconomic status. This finding points to the critical role of

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this function, and the need to identify best practices and policies in how this resource is deployed and staffed. That the counselor was a significant source predictor variable does not mean that all parents were able to access counselor time and attention. Those that had better college knowledge scores did, and those who were less knowledgeable didn't. Does this mean that the former were more interpersonally aggressive or lucky, or that they happened to have children in schools with a relatively high ratio of counselors, or that counselors in some schools paid particular attention to the college knowledge issue? There are important policy implications to these questions.

College representatives are also significant variable sources for low- and middle-SES parents. Again, this points to the need to better understand how teachers and college representatives can maximize their effectiveness in their respective roles.

For low- and middle-SES parents, one's generation is the most significant demographic predictor of college knowledge. Since the major effect seems to be between first and all later generations, the importance of this variable is probably a function of language barriers or differences in understanding how to "work the system." Since English proficiency itself was not a significant predictor for either low- or middle-SES sub-groups, the social capital interpretation may be more correct. Another possible explanation, not testable with these data, is the fact that first generation Latinos are more likely to move residences more frequently, which may put them out of sync with college knowledge sources and channels.

Unique to low-SES parents is the importance of family members and relatives. It is difficult to speculate on the underlying ingredients of this relationship.

A significant and unique source of college knowledge for middle-SES parents is their affiliation with a union. Likewise, a significant channel of communication for middle-SES parents is the Internet.

The differences between the three SES groups point to the need for additional research and understanding for their unique roles in the lives of Latino parents at different socio-economic stations.

RESULTS FROM CASE INTERVIEWS

The case interviews tended to both qualify and reinforce the results observed in the descriptive and predictive analyses of the survey. Recalling that the case sample was composed entirely of lower- and middle-SES parents, some of the more salient and interesting themes included the following:

THE DREAM OF EDUCATION

The quantitative results mentioned above about educational expectations were underscored in the comments of parents. While many don't entirely understand the technical details of college matriculation, they are strong supporters of their children. The following comments, offered as advice to other parents, are indicative of these aspirations.

> *One has to prepare the children ... That you want a better life for them.*

> *They should support their children to move ahead in their education because it is the only inheritance that one can leave to them.*

> *My advice would be for the parents to encourage their children to go to the university.*

> *Continuing their education in university is the only way that they can get ahead.*

There was one missing ingredient from the interviews in terms of parental educational aspirations. That is, not one parent spontaneously voiced a clear understanding and concern about how job opportunities and career paths are changing, and that college will not only be useful to "get ahead" but increasingly essential to stay even. In other words, not only is tactical college knowledge lacking, but also so is strategic understanding about the value of higher education in a changing economy.

THE POWER OF FAMILIES AND THE LIMITATIONS OF CLASS

For many Latino parents, their family of origin is a significant asset in helping get their child through the milestones of preparation for college. It will be recalled that the regression analysis of the survey indicated that use of families was a significant predictor of college knowledge for low-SES families. This is particularly so if sisters, brothers, or parents themselves have had college experiences. For example:

> *My sister gave my son some books preparing for college. My other sisters asked him where he is going to school. ... Grandma is still here, so she is the same.*

> *My brother has been to different colleges; he has a good job. I asked him many questions and received much information from him.*

> *My other son who is two years older, well they are both teachers. One is a counselor and the other is a teacher. They shared information. That was a great help.*

> *I talk to my mom who is very knowledgeable. My mom is well educated. She's a nurse. She pushes everyone to go to college because she thinks there's a lot out there that we need to take advantage of like grants and scholarships.*

However, this asset is often much less available for low-SES parents, particularly those that may be in the first generation of immigration. For example, a number of interviews among low-SES parents talked about family members or relatives having little experience or interest in the college experience. In addition, many parents indicated that family members were still living in the country of origin, thus making family gatherings a less useful vehicle for sharing college knowledge. The following are illustrative comments:

> *I don't have family here.*

> *We don't know because we are among the first generation to go to university. We are learning from our children.*

> *I have two sisters that live down in Florida. Those sisters did not go to college.*

> *Most of them haven't even been to college or live in another state.*

> *My siblings and I don't talk about college. ... We haven't had the education. I talk to my siblings in Mexico just for a short while about the money.*

There is another way in which lower-SES standing impacts the acquisition of college knowledge, particularly in terms of the logistics of engaging school resources. Many, if not most, lower-SES parents work long hours, and many of those families have both parents employed, creating significant difficulties in scheduling teacher and counselor conferences or attending school events. Scheduling conflicts were mentioned in many interviews.

THE STRATEGY OF ENGAGEMENT

One pattern of quantitative findings from the regression analyses seemed to indicate that some low- and middle-SES parents do better at acquiring college knowledge by actively engaging teachers, counselors, and college representatives in the process. This relationship was richly confirmed in the case interviews. Whatever going-in college knowledge that parents have, they seem to make heroic efforts to get what additional information they need for their children. The most common source within the school is a counselor, closely followed by teachers. In many cases they do this in spite of difficulties in scheduling

meetings with school personnel, lack of familiarity with how the schools work, and language difficulties. Many of their interactions with school personnel are ad hoc and informal; although parent-teacher conferences are the most important channel for learning about issues such as college prep and AP courses. The following words need little further comment:

> *I have gone to the school many times.*

> *I communicate with people that speak English. If I cannot do that, I try! My daughter tells me that I speak better English when I am mad.*

> *Go to the schools and talk to the counselors so that they can inform you.*

> *I kept on calling the counselor and asking him questions. When I was anxious, he calmed me down and told me not to worry, that everything was going to be fine.*

> *I had a constant call with the teachers. I would call them at least twice a month.*

> *I think setting up appointments with the educators. Usually, when it's in a meeting they don't have time to cover certain things or certain concerns. ...*

While for most parents, that aggressive engagement is focused on their child's high school (teachers, counselors), a notable fraction of parents seem to achieve success with college representatives. These engagements occur typically in the context of college nights, college open houses, or campus visits. For those Latino parents—and students—who avail themselves of these opportunities, there appears to be a very high level of satisfaction. What comes across in the interviews is that college representatives seem to be treating Latino parents more like valued potential customers—which they are—than do the high schools. The following comments are telling:

> *Career fairs [or] graduate fairs are an easy way to obtain information. Since it's a fair you have a lot of representatives that can talk to you about many universities.*

> *They provided the meetings ... three different meetings, the tours, it was great.*

> *College nights are very good, because if you can get information from one school, the rep can really, I should not say hound, but he can give you more information than you are expecting.*

> *I feel that the college representatives do a fantastic job in coming out to different schools.*

> *They were really supportive ... It was good advice.*

> *I found them to be very informative; they are willing to answer any question that you have. ... Some of them even give you their home number.*

> *They have been very important. I went to many college fairs. ... I went to the booths of the colleges I was more interested in and got the information I wanted.*

> *They are very helpful, they explain you everything.*

There were representatives that spoke Spanish.

You have to be friendly with them; talk to them as a person who wants information and the best for her or his children ... they see you are friendly toward them, and they talk to you openly. ... They have people that speak Spanish.

If they had not talked to my children about their careers, they would not have their current jobs.

Some parents do not avail themselves of opportunities to talk to college representatives. The most frequent reason to abstain touches upon a theme that was pervasive in the case interviews, particularly among lower-SES parents. That issue was language.

THE WEAK ROLE OF PTAS

It should be noted that the strategy of engagement did not extend to PTA organizations. By the relative absence of mentions among our case interviews, or the dismissive nature of comments, it was clear that for the most part they are not seen as a very useful source of college knowledge. While some parents professed PTA membership, only a few described the PTA as useful for acquiring college knowledge and they seemed to be ones who are adept at interpersonal networking.

A few parent associations hold special events that were relevant to Latino college matriculation. These included: alumni-parent mixers, bus tours to colleges for students and parents, and staffing "college rooms" at the high schools. All in all, however, this appeared to be an underutilized resource for Latino parents.

THE ISOLATION OF LANGUAGE

Far and away, the most commonly cited obstacle to gaining college knowledge was the language barrier. This was mentioned in the context of teacher meetings, counselor conferences, written materials about SAT tests or other key milestones, correspondence from colleges, or face-to-face interactions with college representatives. Not surprisingly, the issue of language was mentioned as a roadblock most frequently by lower-SES parents, many of whom are first-generation immigrants. The following are both poignant and illustrative:

I don't speak English very well. That is the major problem especially when it comes to complicated words and one only knows the easy words. The majority [of teachers] doesn't [speak Spanish].

There are never translators.

Some of them do not speak Spanish, so you have to find someone that is bilingual.

All the letters that the school sends are in English.

They should have more representatives that speak Spanish.

They always spoke in English. My son was the only one that understood. He translated for me everything that they had said.

I don't speak English. Almost all of them are Americans.

All the materials are in English.

I also have problem with the language. Sometimes there is absolutely no help. Where do I go? The father is bilingual but he leaves work late.

There was another twist on the language issue that was somewhat expected. That was the relatively weak role being played by Spanish-language media—newspapers, radio, and TV. It will be recalled that these sources did not figure significantly in the quantitative analysis of the survey data. That general finding was reinforced by the case-study interviews. Only rarely were these media sources mentioned in the interviews, and often the reference was to advertisements by an education or training provider on Spanish-language TV or in Spanish-language newspapers. While the latter provide contact information for schools, they do not typically deal with the instrumental steps in the sense that we are considering college knowledge. The following comments are suggestive of a troubling trend that needs to be further explored:

> *Oh, are you talking about the advertisements? One always sees certain information advertised on television.*

> *No, I listen to the Spanish channels, I watch the Spanish networks, and I have to say that unfortunately they do not advertise anything about schools.*

> *Radio or TV, no. I watch a lot of the Spanish TV and I listen to the Spanish radio. Once in a blue moon you'll see the commercials come out and talk about getting your child ready for school. Not very often.*

> *I've heard on TV about how to prepare your children for college but they're short commercials.*

> *I think that it's very limited what they talk about. They probably recognize Hispanic people that have been able to do this or that but in regards to information it's very little.*

> *I never see [in Spanish newspapers] information about open houses ... sometimes, scholarship kind of things, but very very rare ... I think our community really lacks recognition of how important it is to push kids to go to college.*

> *Yes, television talks about universities but it is very rare for the news. The information that I have seen has been on commercials. I would like to see more information on TV.*

> *Sometimes on Spanish TV they talk about universities, but not very much. They don't give very much information, just telephone numbers.*

There were a few positive mentions:

> *Yes, we have channels 66 and 44, and sometimes they have news or programs about colleges.*

> *Two years ago, Channel 41 aired that information. They mentioned the scholarships and had a phone number. ... They even interviewed some Hispanic students about their colleges, and how they were admitted.*

Interestingly, there seemed to be more positive comments about substantive programming and articles about these topics in the English-language print and electronic media.

CHILDREN AS INFORMATION CONDUITS

One result of language barriers, and the weak experience base in higher education among many Latino parents, is that their children become the de facto communication conduits to various college knowledge sources. In other

words, while the written materials may come addressed to the parents, the children will often be asked to translate. Similarly, children may function as a third ear and voice in a parent's conversation with a teacher or college representative. While this may create some interesting role ambiguities within the family, for the most part it seems to be a positive arrangement that often brings parent and child closer. For example:

> *The truth is that I have never gone to talk with them because it was always my daughter who did it.*

> *My son has taken these classes. The counselor or teach talked directly to him and not to me.*

> *Yes my children read them because it's in English.*

> *The representatives seem to want to talk more with the children and not the parents. They give you the time if you push your way past the crowd.*

> *Jennifer took A.P. Classes and I found out about them through her.*

We did sense some hints of alienation or resentment on the part of a few parents regarding this information dependency on their children, perhaps unavoidable given the context. At the intersection of language difficulties and dependence upon children, several parents complained that colleges only addressed their children in correspondence or reps ignored them at college nights.

One might also question the challenge that this places on the child. Not only must the son or daughter aggressively search for college-related information, but also function as an arbiter and translator for one or both parents. For the stronger and self-reliant young person this probably contributes to his or her development. One can only surmise how many less resourceful others will leave the scene and jettison their college aspirations.

THE INTERNET POTENTIAL

In about half the case interviews the Internet was an important information source, albeit in many cases an indirect one. Illustrating the child-conduit role discussed above, the model response of parent Internet "users" was along the lines of: "my child gets online, the information is great, I don't know how to use it, but I want to learn."

There seems to be a huge upside potential for the Internet as a channel for parental college knowledge. Many of the access issues that are exacerbated by SES and language barriers dissolve through interactive media. As college Web sites get more and more language-friendly to Latino applicants, and as high-speed Internet access continues its penetration into Latino communities, many of the college knowledge problems described here will decrease. This will be an important benefit of finally closing the digital divide for Latinos.

CONCLUSIONS, POTENTIAL ACTIONS & POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Several conclusions seem to be supported by the data reported in this study, as do a number of potential action and policy recommendations.

I. LIMITED COLLEGE KNOWLEDGE AMONG LATINO PARENTS, AND LOWER LEVELS OF COLLEGE MATRICULATION, ARE MATTERS OF NATIONAL IMPORTANCE.

Based on the survey, the average level of college knowledge among Latino parents is objectively low. Given the relatively low levels of educational attainment and college matriculation among Latinos, the extent of parental college knowledge may be both a contributing factor and an unfortunate outcome. Several potential actions come to mind:

- Make increased college knowledge a priority among Latino advocacy, political, and cultural organizations. Parents must know what they should do to prepare their children for college and when they need to do it.
- Make increased college attendance a performance metric for the ongoing assessment of secondary schools.
- Latino-serving community based organizations (CBOs) should incorporate material emphasizing the need for parents to know about college prerequisites for their children.
- School districts with Latino immigrant constituencies should review their programs on how to disseminate college knowledge to non-English speaking parents.
- State education funds should be allocated to initiate dissemination of college knowledge among their minority populations. Moreover, those states with particularly high Latino immigrant populations (California, New York, Florida, Illinois, Texas) should task their departments of education to explore more effective ways of disseminating information about college prerequisites among their limited-English-speaking populations.
- The U.S. Department of Education, as well as interested foundations and corporations, should set aside funds to begin national public service awareness campaigns highlighting the need for minority parents to learn about college prerequisites for their children. The campaigns would encompass both Spanish-language and English-language radio and TV, and would spotlight the tactical college knowledge that parents need to apply, as well promote understanding of the economic and cultural value of higher education.
- Congress should consider increasing and earmarking Immigrant Education (ESEA-VII-C) funds for developing public awareness of basic college knowledge prerequisites in states and localities with large immigrant populations.

II. THE COLLEGE KNOWLEDGE SHORTFALL IS EXACERBATED BY SES AND IMMIGRATION STATUS.

The college knowledge shortfall among Latinos seems to be associated with SES and immigration status. Potential actions include:

- Launch increased and focused college knowledge outreach to Latino parents in low-SES communities.
- Expand understanding among low-SES and immigrant communities and families about economic trends, future labor markets, and the rationale for college matriculation.

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III.

Language barriers are a major obstacle to increasing college knowledge.

Common to all college knowledge sources and channels is that they are communication vehicles. For most of them, English is the language of choice. This places a special burden on Latino parents with limited English skills. Again, there are several potential actions:

- High schools need to increase the number of counselors and teachers who are genuinely bilingual.
- All hard-copy correspondence to parents from high schools should be routinely provided in both Spanish and English.
- College application materials and descriptive literature, whether hard copy or available on Web sites, should be routinely provided in both Spanish and English.
- All college knowledge informational events—college nights, open houses—should be routinely staffed with bilingual Spanish speakers and translators.

IV.

Market-Based Approaches to Increasing College Knowledge Work Well.

Colleges themselves have the most incentives to increase college knowledge among Latinos. As the fastest growing segment of the national population, particularly the youth cohort, Latinos should account for an increasing percent of future college enrollments. It is in the self-interest of colleges and universities to make this happen. While exposure to college representatives and college events is less than other sources and channels, it seems to be very robust in impact. This suggests some potential actions:

- Increase the scope, frequency, and visibility of college "events" such as college nights, open houses, and campus visitations. Consideration should be given to scheduling for two-parent working Latino families who may have only weekends available for such events.
- Working with college admissions offices, increase the use of "college rooms" in high schools. These facilities, typically staffed by parent and alumni volunteers as well as counselors, provide students with a range of materials about colleges of all types. They also provide information about required tests, application processes, financial aid, and other college-relevant knowledge.
- Make campus visits more accessible to Latino parents via a range of services such as: flexible scheduling of campus tours (e.g., weekends), arranging group tours, providing bilingual guides, decreasing costs via subsidized lodging, and emphasizing the positive campus atmosphere for Latinos (e.g., culture and support).

V.

"Best Practice" Approaches are Needed—and Soon.

The rapid growth of the college-age Latino population has caught many organizations flat footed in terms of a meaningful response. The urgency of this situation demands that high schools, colleges, and government agencies learn from one another, rather than each craft a unique response. This suggests some potential actions:

- One or more national inventories or surveys should be commissioned to uncover demonstrably effective approaches to addressing the issues of increasing college knowledge and Latino college matriculation. A "benchmarking" approach[21] should be used to identify best-practice models based primarily on achieved results. In turn, the exemplary models should be richly described and documented, and nationally disseminated.

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[21] Tornatzky, L (2000). "Benchmarking university-industry relationships: A user-centered evaluation approach." Presentation to US-European Conference on Learning from Science and Technology Policy Evaluation, Bad Herrenalb, Germany, September 11–14, 2000.

PARENT COLLEGE KNOWLEDGE MINI-TEST

(Correct answers are indicated by an X)

1 From what you know, are advanced placement classes often counted toward college credits?

Yes X

No ___

Don' t Know ___

2 From what you know, do colleges usually value a grade earned in an advanced placement course more highly than a grade received in a regular course?

Yes X

No ___

Don't Know ___

3 From what you know, do college prep courses include a two-year foreign language course other than English?

Yes X

No ___

Don't Know ___

4 From what you know, in what grade should your child start college prep courses?

9th grade X

10th grade ___

11th grade ___

12th grade ___

Don't Know ___

5 From what you know, does a community college usually offer the same bachelor's degree that a university offers?

Yes ___

No X

Don't Know ___

6 To the best of your knowledge, which of the following tests is intended to give colleges a measure of your child's knowledge in specific subjects? Is it the Scholastic Aptitude Test II (or SAT-2), or the Graduate Record Exam (or GRE)?

The Scholastic Aptitude Test II X

Graduate Record Exam ___

Don't Know ___

7 To the best of your knowledge, is a non-citizen, permanent resident eligible to receive federal student financial aid?

Yes X

No ___

Don't Know ___

8 To the best of your knowledge, are the resident tuition and fees about the same for a four-year state college as they are for a two-year community college?

Yes ___

No X

Don't Know ___

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STUDY METHODOLOGY

THE TELEPHONE SURVEY

The procedures used in the phone survey component of the study were as follows:

SAMPLE

Phone interviews were conducted from a sample of 1,054 Latino parents, drawn from the Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago metropolitan areas. Each city sample was selected[22] so as to be representative of the Latino population under study in that area.

DATA COLLECTION

A survey questionnaire[23] consisting of 78 items was organized into five broad areas:

- Demographics of the responding parent and his/her family. These included items such as number and ages of children, income, and educational attainment;
- Educational expectations regarding the child, and his/her actual level of academic performance;
- An objective "mini-test"[24] of the college knowledge of the responding parent. This consisted of eight items that covered factual information about advanced placement courses, college costs, college prep curriculum, and types of colleges and how to apply;
- An inventory of preferred sources of college knowledge. For example, to what extent was college knowledge acquired from a teacher, counselor, family member, or friend;
- An inventory of preferred channels of acquiring college knowledge (e.g., a meeting, an informal conversation, electronic media, and newspapers, the Internet).

ANALYSIS

The survey data were analyzed in two ways. The simplest approach was descriptive, looking at sample and sub-sample averages on a few measures. A predictive analysis sorted out[25] which factors seemed to be strongly associated with parent college knowledge.

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22 The survey sample was drawn from metropolitan phone directory listings with Spanish surnames. Excluding unusable telephone numbers (e.g., disconnected numbers and fax numbers), a total of 7,730 directory-listed households with Spanish surnames were initially contacted. Of those, 3,138 people refused to be interviewed at the onset of the call (it cannot be ascertained how many of them were eligible for the survey). An additional 3,000 people were excluded via a screening question on whether they "have a child aged between 13 and 24 living with you." The final sample of 1,054 completed interviews was distributed 33%, 34%, and 33% from the New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles metropolitan statistical areas (MSA).

23 The questionnaire is available from the authors.

24 A parent respondent could get a score of 0–8, reflecting his or her level of college-relevant knowledge. Of 1,054 valid responses, the mean college knowledge score was 3.51 out of 8.

25 The general approach was regression analysis, with college knowledge (a score of 0–8) being the dependent variable. The basic logic of the analytic approach is to predict an outcome (in this case, college knowledge) on the basis of several predictor or independent variables. In all analyses, the relative importance of 19 independent variables in predicting college knowledge was being considered. Specifically, the predictors include: (1) Teacher as information source, (2) School counselor as information source, (3) College representative as information source, (4) Family member or relative as information source, (5) Child or child's friend as information source, (6) Informal conversation as information channel, (7) Printed materials as information channel, (8) Teacher-parent conference as information channel, (9) The Internet as information source, (10) Parent's immigrant generation, (11) Parent's level of English proficiency, (12) Parent's age, (13) Parent's marital status, (14) Parent's church attendance, (15) Parent's perception of locus of responsibility, (16) Union membership, (17) Attendance at school events, (18) Attendance at after school program, and (19) Children currently in high school.

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THE CASE-STUDY INTERVIEWS

The procedures used in the case-study interviews were as follows:

SAMPLE

The 41 completed case-study interviews were intended to tap into the experience of "positive outlier" parents in acquiring and effectively using college knowledge. Prior research and the phone survey results from this project indicated that parents' educational background and income are good predictors of the extent to which they have college knowledge. As a result, we tried to define a case-study sample of parents of modest socio-economic status who nonetheless had high scores (top quartile) on college knowledge. Two sub-groups of parents who had previously participated in the telephone survey comprised the case-study sample:

- Fifty-five (55) parents were identified whose combined household income was less than $35,000 who had a high school education or less and who achieved a "parental college knowledge" score of five out of eight or higher. Of these, 30 tentatively agreed to participate in the case interviews, and 21 interviews were completed.
- Fifty-seven (57) parents were identified who scored six or higher on the college knowledge index, and who either had income greater than $35,000 but with a high school education or less, or whose income was below $35,000 and may have had some college education. Of these, 24 tentatively agreed to participate in the case interviews, and 20 interviews were completed.

DATA COLLECTION

A semi-structured, seven-page interview protocol was constructed consisting of over 40 items, including prompts and short follow-ups. Virtually all items were open-ended and designed to encourage participants to talk extemporaneously around various topics. The content of the items was steered somewhat by the results of the phone survey. For example, we knew that significant sources of information were teachers, school counselors, family members or relatives, and college representatives, and the questions honed in for more qualitative detail. In addition, a prominent theme of the prompts was to ask respondents their opinions on the efficacy of various college knowledge sources or channels. These were typically phrased along the lines of "what seems to have worked best" or "what seems to be a problem or a roadblock?"

All but one of the case interviews was conducted in a face-to-face venue by bilingual interviewers in each of the three metropolitan areas. Interviews took less than an hour, were recorded, transcribed, and as necessary, translated from Spanish into English. Interviewees were paid $50 for their participation. All interviewers received training on the substance and methods of the project, although all had extensive prior experience in working with Latino families or community organizations.

ANALYSIS

Two researchers closely and independently read the transcribed responses. A set of thematic coding categories was devised and applied to the transcribed interviews. Any disagreements between the two raters were resolved by discussion, and the prevalence of themes across interviews was assessed by a simple counting procedure.

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26 The interview protocol is available from the authors.

27 The training session comprised a thorough orientation to the structure and purpose of the survey, the intent of each question in the interview guide, interviewing and probing techniques, administrative procedures, recording techniques, and a workshop in which each interviewer conducted an interview over a speakerphone while the others listened, took notes, prompted with probes, and helped answer questions about the meaning of questions and so forth. The interviewers went over their notes, shared what they had learned, and fine-tuned and simplified the wording of the interview guide, particularly the Spanish version.

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